International Journal of Advance Studies and Growth Evaluation

Indian Mythology's Voices of Women and the Fight against Gender-Based Violence in Contemporary Society

[1] Shweta Sharma

[1] Assistant Professor, KLE'S Raj-Rajeshwari Arts & Commerce, College for Women, Ranebennur, Karnataka, India.

*Corresponding Author
Shweta Sharma
Assistant Professor, KLE'S Raj-Rajeshwari Arts & Commerce, College for Women, Ranebennur, Karnataka, India.

Abstract

A collection of mythical tales, particularly those originating from a specific religious or cultural tradition, is called mythology. It represents a society's conventions, traditions, and beliefs. From the earliest tales to the present, women have been recognized as powerful forces with an inherent ability to change lives and push limits. Indian mythology contains examples of discrimination against and marginalization of women. Gender norms and stereotypes are sometimes reinforced by stories that show women as less valuable than men. Women face prejudice in the modern world in many different contexts, such as social standing, employment, and education. The constraints and patriarchal norms imposed on women are often reflected in Indian mythology. Stories such as the Ramayana's Devi Sita exile and the Mahabharata's Swayamvara of Draupadi have undermined women's agency and autonomy. The independence, alternatives, and opportunities given to women are restricted by patriarchal standards and behaviors that persist in today's culture. Occasionally, violent and exploitative behaviors against women are depicted in mythological legends. Examples of women's vulnerability are terrible, such as when Draupadi is stripped naked in the Mahabharata and when Ravana kidnaps Sita. In today's society, women continue to face numerous forms of violence, including sexual harassment, domestic abuse, and crimes committed with their gender as the motivation.

Keywords: Gender Stereotype, Women's Condition, Mythology, and Modern Society.

Introduction

One of the oldest mythologies and religions in the world is found in Indian mythology. A collection of mythical tales, particularly those originating from a specific religious or cultural tradition, is called mythology. It represents a society's conventions, traditions, and beliefs. Hindu mythology is another name for Indian mythology. The well-known epics of the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Vedas, and Puranas are all included in this essay. "A system of hereditary stories of ancient origin which were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group" is how A Glossary of Literary Terms defines mythology.

It offers an explanation for social customs and observances, establishes the sanctions for the rules by which people conduct their lives, and explains why the world is as it is and things happen as they do (Abrams & Harpham, 230). On the other hand, myth is the fundamental element of many cultures and societies. It reflects the customs, values, way of life, and folklore of a community.

Folklore and mythology are crucial to the development of communities. Myth has served as a global source of inspiration for writers and artists, and it is currently a well-known genre in both literary fiction and non-fiction writing. Hindu religious literature in India is full with these kinds of myths, especially in the two great epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. These two great epics are valued as social treatises in addition to religious texts. It still has a big influence on Indian culture and daily life. Many people believe that these two epics are the most often adapted literary masterpieces.

Women's Condition in Mythology and Modern Society

Women's difficulties are multifaceted and intricate in both mythology and contemporary culture, shaped by social, cultural, and historical factors. Throughout history, women have often been marginalized, had their voices silenced, and had their rights curtailed. This marginalization endures in many aspects of contemporary culture and is reflected in

various legendary tales. In mythology, women are often portrayed as supporting roles, underdogs, or archetypes, typically characterized by their interactions with men. They are portrayed as wives, mothers, sisters, or seductresses, which diminishes female authority and reinforces gender stereotypes. In mythology, women who defy social conventions may be subjected to objectification, violence, or retaliation. Women still face a number of challenges in today's society. There are many different ways that gender inequality manifests itself in society, such as the gender wage gap, the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions, institutional discrimination, and knowledge gaps. Women continue to struggle for protection from gender-based violence, equal access to healthcare and education, and the right to have children. By subjecting women from marginalized areas to additional levels of discrimination based on factors like colour, ethnicity, class, or sexual orientation, intersectionality exacerbates these difficulties even more.

From the earliest tales to the present, women have been recognized as powerful forces with an inherent ability to change lives and push limits. Indian mythology contains examples of discrimination against and marginalization of women. Gender norms and stereotypes are sometimes reinforced by stories that show women as less valuable than men. Women face prejudice in the modern world in many different contexts, such as social standing, employment, and education. Indian mythology often mirrors the constraints and patriarchal norms imposed on women.

Both the Mahabharata and the Ramayana depict women as inferior to men, which is a common representation of old gender standards and expectations. These texts reinforce cultural norms that restrict women's autonomy and choices by highlighting the importance of chastity, obedience, and duty. Similar to this, gender stereotypes and rigid expectations hinder women's progress and ability to express themselves in today's culture. Women in epics often suffer from a lack of voice and agency. Whether it's their fathers, husbands, or other male relatives, they are often influenced and dominated by male figures.

The Ramayana and the Mahabharata both have depictions of violence and prejudice against women. In the Ramayana, Devi Sita deals with abandonment, exile, and accusations of infidelity, while Draupadi in the Mahabharata experiences public humiliation and an attempt at undressing. The prevalence of gender-based violence and discrimination in modern culture, including victim-blaming, sexual assault, and domestic abuse, is highlighted by these topics. The epics place a strong emphasis on marriage, and women's marital relationships often have an impact on their lives. In both scriptures, women are expected to be devoted wives regardless of how they are treated or deceived. In today's society, women in marriage still confront barriers such as domestic violence, marital inequity, and expectations from their spouses that impede their ability to pursue their own goals and well-being.

Mahashweta Devi's Draupadi, for example, enables us to look at the struggles that women confront and how society views women. A major figure in Mahashweta Devi's Draupadi, a work in which the patriarchal system affects the protagonist. It is possible to see Draupadi as both a continuation and a reimagining of the Mahabharata's Draupadi.

Even though the two are identical, Mahashweta Devi's depiction of Draupadi adds new dimensions that raise her status in both mythology and modern culture, reinforcing the idea that the patriarchal system is dominant in both. Legend has it that Draupadi is a brave, compassionate woman who is revered for her beauty and power. She examines the psychological and emotional effects of Draupadi's events while concentrating on the intricacy of her personality. By giving Draupadi a voice, Mahashweta Devi tackles problems of gender discrimination, cultural expectations, and women's captivity. In contrast, she portrays Draupadi as a self-reliant woman with a strong spirit who fights against her oppressors, challenging the notion that she is a hapless victim. By emphasising themes of power relations, consent, and agency, Mahashweta Devi highlights the difficulties faced by women in patriarchal society. Devi disagrees with the Hindu narrative that the female body is inferior and should only be used for sexual gain. For example, Goddess Durga, considered "a good wife" during her incarnation as Sati, burns her body to death because she is so distraught at her father's treatment of her husband, Lord Shiva. Out of rage, Lord Shiva dances across the world holding Sati's body. After that, Lord Vishnu dismembers her body and distributes her parts over the universe. Every piece of Sati's body turns becomes a place of worship and homage. The Mahabharata also contains another example of the female body being used for sexual gain-Draupadi's revirginization after being married to every Pandava. The final outcome in both Durga and Draupadi's instances is what happens to their bodies. The story of Mahashweta Devi's Draupadi is still relevant in light of contemporary culture. The figure's portrayal addresses contemporary issues with women's empowerment, gender equality, and consent. The story of Draupadi is a powerful reminder of how important it is to challenge gender norms, oppose injustice, and defend the rights of women. Mahashweta Devi's retelling of Draupadi provides a platform for discussing and resolving issues such as gender-based violence, patriarchy, and the significance of honoring and hearing the viewpoints of women. People are prompted to question and criticize established norms that perpetuate gender inequality and prejudice by her portrayal. Draupadi's courage and will to stand up for justice, equality, and autonomy still inspires women today.

Conclusion

As a result, there are parallels and divergences between the treatment of women in contemporary culture and mythology. Since mythology reflects the cultural norms and beliefs of the period it was written, it often shows women suffering from issues like limited autonomy, violence, discrimination, and constrictive gender roles.

These issues persist in contemporary culture even if they have their roots in historical narratives, albeit with some developments and alterations. However, it's critical to acknowledge that these issues have been resolved and that advancements have been achieved. In today's culture, much progress has been achieved toward women's empowerment, gender equality, and challenging patriarchal traditions. Women today have more alternatives for leadership roles, professional progression, and education, even if injustices and inequalities still persist.

In the arts, business, and politics, among other professions, women are becoming more visible and well-represented. More and more women are speaking up, standing up for their rights, and debunking gender stereotypes.

References

1. Agnes Flavia. Redefining the Agenda of the Women's Movement within a Secular Framework. In *Women in Right Wing Movements: Indian Experiences*. Edited by Tanika Sarkar and Urvashi Butalia. London: Zed Books, 1995, 136-57.
2. Banerjee Sumanta. Bogey of the Bawdy: Changing Concept of 'Obscenity' in 19th Century Bengali Culture. *Economic & Political Weekly*. 2009; 22:1197-206.
3. BBC News. Dark is Divine: What Colour are Indian Gods and Goddesses? *BBC News*. January 21. Available online: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-42637998 (accessed on 30 May 2019), 2018.
4. Biernacki Lorelai. *Renowned Goddess of Desire: Women, Sex, and Speech in Tantra*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
5. Dasgupta, Koral. Draupadi. Pan, 2022.
6. Krishna Asha. "The Rise of Mythological Fiction in India." Curious. The Reader, 2018.
7. Mohamed D. W.and DoniaGamila. "How Mythology Shapes Modern World Literature: The Echoes of Mythology." Research Gate, 2018.